Asa Di Vaar: The Heroic Ode of the Morning

A synthesis of martial balladry and divine philosophy sung at Amrit Vela.

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ॥

ਵਾਰ ਸਲੋਕਾ ਨਾਲਿ ਸਲੋਕ ਭੀ ਮਹਲੇ ਪਹਿਲੇ ਕੇ ਲਿਖੇ ਟੁੰਡੇ ਅਸ ਰਾਜੈ ਕੀ ਧੁਨੀ ॥

Playfair Display The Form

A Ballad (Ode) set in Raag Asa, the musical mode of hope and early dawn.

Playfair Display The Paradox

A 'heroic' musical measure historically used for war, repurposed to fight the internal battle against ego.

Playfair Display The Time

Recited daily in Sikh congregations during the pre-dawn hours (approx. 4:00 A.M.).

Historical Origins & Authorship

www.sikhizm.com

The Authors

✍ **Guru Nanak Dev Ji** (First Guru): Composed all **24 Pauris** (stanzas) and **44 Sloks**.

Guru Angad Dev Ji (Second Guru): Added 15 specific **Sloks** to the composition.

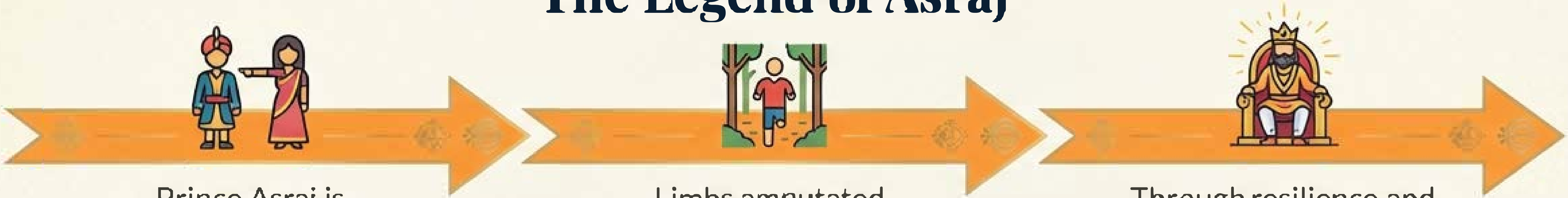
Janamsakhi Traditions

- **Pak Pattan:** Recited during a dialogue with Sheikh Kamal regarding the dual forces of good and evil.
- **Lahore:** Addressed to Duni Chand to highlight the futility of hoarding wealth.

It is a master composition of Guru Nanak. In its present form, as recorded in *Guru Granth Sahib*, it contains 24 stanzas called *pauris* and 59 (60) couplets called *sloaks*. All the pauris are composed by Guru Nanak, whereas, out of 59 sloaks, 44 are composed by Guru Nanak and 15 by Guru Angad Dev.

The Musical Form: The Ballad of Tunda Asraaja

The Legend of Asraj



Prince Asraj is falsely accused by his stepmother.

Limbs amputated ('Tunda') and abandoned in the forest.

Through resilience and piety, he eventually becomes King.

"Singing spiritual truths to a heroic ballad tune infuses the listener with martial spirit to battle their own internal vices."

"*tunday as raajai kee Dhunee*" (Sing to the tune of Tunda Asraaja)

The Architecture of the Hymn

Total Pauris (Stanzas):
24 (All Guru Nanak)

Total Sloks (Staves):
59 (44 Guru Nanak,
15 Guru Angad)

Counting of the Total Sloks	
Pauris 1, 2, 11, 18:	Preceded by 3 Sloks each (Total 12).
Pauris 12, 15:	Preceded by 4 Sloks each (Total 8).
Pauri 22:	Preceded by 5 Sloks (Total 5).
Remaining 17 Pauris:	Preceded by 2 Sloks each (Total 34).
Grand Total:	**59 Sloks.**

Narrative Mechanics: The General & The Specific

The Slok (The Solo)		The Pauri (The Chorus)
	www.sikhizm.com	
• **Corresponds to:** The Strophe		• **Corresponds to:** The Antistrophe
• **Sung in:** Solo / Recitative	Sequence of Recitation	• **Sung in:** Chorus
• **Function:** Illustrates with specific examples from nature and customs.		• **Function:** Expresses the core thesis in general terms.

Prof. Teja Singh compares this structure to an ancient Greek Choral Ode.

Theme I: The Nature of the Divine

He Himself created Himself; He Himself assumed His Name. Secondly, He fashioned the creation; seated within the creation, He beholds it with delight.

ਆਪੀਨੈ ਆਪੁ ਸਾਜਿਓ ਆਪੀਨੈ ਰਚਿਓ ਨਾਉ ॥
ਦੁਯੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਾਜੀਐ ਕਰਿ ਆਸਣੁ ਡਿਠੋ ਚਾਉ ॥

Satnaam: Truth is the Name.

Nirbha-o / Nirvair: Without Fear, Without Enmity.

Hukam: The Divine Will that governs all life and death.

Theme II: Kudrat (Nature as Divine Vessel)

"By His Power we see, by His Power we hear... By His Power the nether worlds exist, and the Akaashic ethers."

Core Theological Takeaway

Immanence: Nature is not separate from God. It is the vessel in which He resides and beholds **with delight.** The text lists the heavens, Vedas, and all species as **manifestations of this Power** (Kudrat).

Theme III: The Disease of Ego & The Cure

Haumai (Ego)

Identified as a '**chronic disease**' (deeragh rog). It is the **root of separation**—in ego humans come and go, in ego they are born and die.

> ਹਉਮੈ ਦੀਰਘ ਰੋਗੁ ਹੈ ਦਾਰੂ ਭੀ ਇਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ ॥
> ha-umai deeragh rog hai daaroo bhee is maahi.

The Guru & Shabad

The text states the disease **contains its own cure: the realization of the Guru's instruction**. Without the Guru, there is '**pitch darkness**' even if a thousand suns were to rise.

Social Commentary: Rituals vs. Ethics

The Sacred Thread (Janeu)

The Guru critiques the wearing of the cotton thread, proposing a spiritual alternative.

Compassion (Cotton) → **Contentment** (Thread) → **Modesty** (Knot) → **Truth** (Twist)

ਦਇਆ ਕਪਾਹ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੂਤੁ ਜਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੁ ॥
da-i-aa kapaah santokh soot jat gandhee sat vat.
Make compassion the cotton, contentment the thread, modesty the knot and truth the twist.

Purity Rituals (Sutak)

Rejects the notion of impurity from birth or death. True impurity is greed of the mind and falsehood of the tongue, not a physical state.

Social Commentary: Equality & Gender

“Why call her bad, from whom kings are born?”

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ

Patriarchy Challenged

In a time of severe gender bias, the text asserts that from woman, man is born and conceived; without woman, there is no one.

Caste Rejected

God does not ask for caste (Jaat). In the Court of God, external status is meaningless; only the ‘Truth’ settles the account.

Key Metaphors & Imagery

The Pitcher



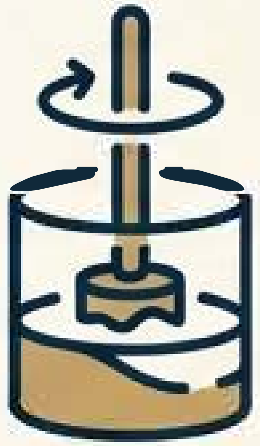
Water is confined in the pitcher, but the pitcher cannot exist without water. (Mind is restrained by wisdom, but wisdom requires the Guru).

The Semal Tree



Straight as an arrow but fruits are tasteless. (A metaphor for arrogance; stature means nothing without humility).

The Cream Separator



Just as a staff separates butter, the 'Fear of God' churns the mind to reveal the essence of Truth.

Cultural Significance: The Morning Prayer



- **Daily Observance:** Standard congregational prayer (Kirtan) for the morning.
- **Tradition:** Recited daily at Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) starting at approx. 4:00 A.M.
- **Participation:** Structure allows the congregation (Sangat) to join the chorus of the Pauris, while Ragis sing the complex Sloks.
- **Moral Compass:** A daily reminder that good and bad deeds are read out in the Court of Dharma.

The ballad in musical mode Asa, popularly called *Asa Di Var* is sung at the places of Sikh early hours of the morning. In Harimandir Sahib (The Golden Temple), Amritsar, it starts at 4:00 a.m.

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In the *Puratan Janamsakhi*, an authentic life account of Gur. this composition is twe s[illegible]ibuted its occasion. In sakhi (story)

Voices of Wisdom: Guru Nanak Dev Ji

A hundred times a day, I am a **sacrifice to my Guru**;
He made angels out of men, without delay.

Sweetness and **humility**, O Nanak, are the essence of **virtue** and **goodness**.

Truth is the **medicine** for all; it removes and washes away our sins.

Voices of Wisdom: Guru Angad Dev Ji

The **blind** are not those who have no eyes in their faces;
The blind are those, O Nanak, who have **strayed from the Lord**.

If a servant performs service, **obeys the Will** of his Master...
his **honor increases**, and he receives **double** his wages.

Whatever **He** has done, or will do, is all by **His Own Will**.

Summary: The Journey to Truth

Asa Di Vaar is a masterful synthesis of music, poetry, and philosophy. It uses the "**heroic**" form of a war ballad not to glorify violence, but to **inspire** the **soul** in its daily battle against **ego** and **falsehood**.

The Path: From the darkness of ignorance (Maya) to the light of **Truth** through the Guru's grace.

The Goal: To understand that the world is God's creation, humility is the greatest virtue, and **truthful living** is the highest form of worship.

Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living.